



ethecon Foundation Ethics & Economics Ahrenshooper Str. 73 D-13051 Berlin Germany

Open Letter
to the Members
of the US Congress

November 28, 2012

Protest against the exploitation of imprisoned offenders

Honorable Members of Congress,

in the United States of America large corporations such as Microsoft, IBM and Boeing long ago discovered an exceptional opportunity to maximize their profits by shifting their production into prisons thus achieving minimal production costs. Prisoners receive only a small wage, sometimes none. Additional costs such as health care or special workplace protection are dispensed with. Instead, these companies enjoy additional tax benefits for employing prisoners. Usually these funds have nothing to do with the meaningful reintegration of prisoners into the labor market after their release. On the contrary, this exploitation of labor behind prison walls reduces the wages of the total workforce and destroys ordinary jobs en masse.

This ruthless exploitation of prisoners is nothing more than a modern form of slavery as prisoners are robbed of their basic rights and their dignity. Imprisonment is identical with all-encompassing control and repressions. For example, inmates have no accredited rights such as to organize to get adequate pay or to strike for better working conditions. There is no right to strike. If imprisoned offenders refuse to work they are imposed with prison penalties.

At the same time, the prisons and the inmates have been turned into a source of gains and profits through the privatization of prisons themselves. Prison companies like the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) in the United

to be continued on the **back page** >>>

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States receive public funds for each prisoner held. CCA maximizes its profits not only by massive overcrowding, which in turn has already led to deaths. Further scandals have arisen through documented cases of neglectful supervision by guards, who actively refrained from intervening in violent clashes among prisoners. These are clear signs that public control has been usurped by privatization.

CCA lobbying efforts remain absolutely scandalous. In order to achieve stricter laws and higher penalties the company spent more than 2,7 million US dollars in the time span between 2006 and 2008 alone. These sums were in no way related to the rehabilitation of the offenders nor were they intended for security or protection of society but were solely targeted as investment for profitable returns. Last year CCA turned over 1,7 billion US dollars. At the same time the United States ranks by far as number one in the ratio of prisoners per capita.

Prison inmates are the most marginalized group of the population. Far from the eyes of the general public, their life and work conditions usually remain invisible -- unless a scandal erupts so large it can no longer be kept secret. A society ought to be judged by whether and how well human rights are guaranteed to its marginalized members.

The ethecon - Foundation Ethics & Economics protests against the exploitation of prisoners whether by prison corporations or corporations that produce inside prisons. We call for the protection of prisoners rights!

Best regards,

Board of Directors and Curates of
ethecon - Foundation Ethics & Economics